

Burglary Of A Factory

A group of boys broke into factory, damaged machines and lit a series of small fires. The factory owner accepted the apology and offered one of the boys a job if he stayed out of trouble.

Damien was a 10 year old boy with learning difficulties. He attended a mainstream school and had a statement of special needs. He had no previous criminal history, but was easily led by older boys. His parents, although shocked by this crime were caring and supportive of Damien. One Sunday afternoon, Damien, together with a small group of boys known to him (two as young as 6) and some older boys of 13 crawled inside a hole in a wire perimeter fence of a large factory which manufactured wooden staircases. The group managed to enter the factory via one of the main doors, which had been ajar. Once inside, the boys began to ransack the factory floor. They smashed a food and drinks machine and ate most of the contents. Some of the older boys then began to light small fires with matches. Damien insisted that he had not been responsible for lighting the fires, and that he had in fact tried to put them out. The fire alarms were activated, and the boys were arrested when police arrived, at the same time as the fire brigade. Damien was given a Final Warning by the police for his part in this offence of burglary. Following assessment by a Youth Offending Team worker, Damien was assigned a volunteer from the Youth Offending Teams' Intervention Team. He agreed to receive six weekly visits to work on issues relating to his offending behaviour. One such visit concentrated on victim awareness. During this session, Damien asked whether it would be possible to apologise face-to-face to the factory owner. The Intervention Team Manager contacted a Police Constable in the Youth Offending Team. The Police Constable visited Damien at home with his parents. During the assessment, Damien was asked what he wanted to say to the Factory Manager. His initial reaction was shy, nervous laughter and an apparent inability to explain his actions. It was gently pointed out to Damien that if a meeting was to be set up with the Factory Manager, who was a very busy man, he would not be very happy if Damien was unable to speak to him. Damien suddenly began to give a lengthy and very convincing account of his actions during the crime. He explained how they had entered the factory, broke into the food and drinks machine, exactly what he had eaten and drunk, what he had broken and ransacked, and how he had tried to put out the fires lit by some of the others. Damien's parents told me that this was exactly the same

version of events that Damien had told them and the police. The Police Constable asked Damien if he thought he would be able to tell the Factory Manager what he had just said. Damien said he would. The Police Constable then contacted Phil, the Factory Manager, and explained the principles of Restorative Justice to him. Phil readily agreed to meet Damien. The Police Constable visited Phil in his office above the factory floor. This was to be the venue for the meeting. The Police Constable spent just over an hour with Phil, the same length of time spent with Damien. For the meeting Damien was supported by his father, James, who, although keen to meet Phil, was very nervous. Phil greeted us and showed us to his office.

Damien seemed fascinated to see the factory floor in full operation. During the meeting, Damien again gave a very full and frank account of his own actions during the offence, for which he took full responsibility. He did not try to minimise what he had done, and afterwards gave a heartfelt apology to Phil. Both Phil and James were visibly moved by Damien's genuine sincerity. Phil thanked Damien for asking to take part in the meeting. He acknowledged his courage and accepted his apology. Phil then went on to describe to Damien his shock and horror on seeing the mess and damage caused to the factory. He explained the financial impact on the company, not only from cleaning up the mess, but from the loss of a day's production, and the cost of replacing damaged goods. Phil also told Damien that he had sacked the security guard on duty on the day of the offence. He also described the impact of the crime on the rest of the staff. Damien listened intently to Phil's side of the story. Phil then asked Damien how old he was. Damien had just had his eleventh birthday. Phil asked Damien whether he thought he might like to work in a place like his factory. Damien nodded furiously. Then, to the surprise of Damien and James, Phil offered Damien a job at the factory when he left school, providing he stayed out of trouble. Damien was delighted, James was choked with emotion. Then came the turn of James to speak. He told Phil that he and his family were not used to dealings with the Police. In fact, when the Police arrived to tell them about Damien's part in this offence, they first thought they had come to tell them that he had been involved in an accident. He described the shame and embarrassment of his son at the police station, but then balanced this with the pride that he felt when his son showed the courage to take responsibility for his actions. James also thanked Phil for his amazing offer of employment for his son. Everyone present was thanked for their contributions, Damien

suddenly asked Phil if he could show him the points of weakness in the factory's security and where they had managed to crawl through the fence. A site tour then followed, with Phil making notes of Damien's observations, with a view to significantly improving the overall security of the inside and out of the building. Damien has not re-offended.